

## CLAIMS:

1. A communications network comprising:
  - a central controller which operates to control a zone of the network and which provides a conference call facility;
  - at least one gateway engaged in a call with a mobile station via a first communication channel;
  - means for generating a hand-off required indication indicating that handover of the call is needed;
  - means at the central controller for receiving said hand-off required indication and opening a conference call channel as a second communication channel for the call; and
  - means for handing over said call from the first to the second communication channels and, if the handover is successful, causing the first communication channel to be closed.
2. A network according to claim 1, which comprises a switched packet communication path by means of which the means for handing over, central controller and the gateway are connected.
3. A network according to claim 1 or 2, wherein the gateway comprises packet generating means for generating a packet addressed to said means for handing over including control information comprising a candidate list of alternative cells to which the call could possibly be transferred.
4. A network according to any preceding claim, wherein the gateway is operable to receive RF information from a mobile station, said RF information including call data, and to convert said RF information into a packet for transmission to the gatekeeper.
5. A network according to any preceding claim, wherein the central controller is operable to multiplex the first and second communication channels, such that the call is conveyed simultaneously by both of said channels until the first communication channel is closed.

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6. A network according to claim 3, wherein the gatekeeper comprises means for selecting a target gateway based on the cells in the candidate list, and for causing said central controller to open the conference call channel to said selected target gateway as a second communication channel.

7. A network according to any preceding claim, which is an internal cellular communications network and which comprises an interface for connection to an external network which includes an external controller such that said call can comprise a first mobile station in the internal cellular communications network and a second mobile station in the external network.

8. A method of effecting handover of a call in which at least one mobile station is engaged via a first communication channel in a communications network comprising a central controller which operates a zone of the network and provides a conference call facility, in which method:

a hand-off required indication is issued indicating that handover of the call is needed;

the central controller receives said hand-off required indication and opens as a second communication channel a conference call channel;

handover of said call is effected from said first to said second communication channel; and

if the handover is successful the first communication channel is closed.

9. A method according to claim 8, wherein the hand-off required indication comprises a packet which is conveyed to the central controller via a switched packet communications path of the network.

10. A method according to claim 8 or 9, wherein the mobile station transmit call data as an RF signal, said call data being converted into a packet for transmission via a switched packet communications path of the network.

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11. A method according to claim 8, 9 or 10, which comprises the step of multiplexing the call via the first and second communication channels at the central controller, prior to closing the first communication channel.

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